

una foto

SOMOS PUERTORRIQUEÑOS
Y ESTAMOS
DESPERTANDO



PUERTO RICAN STUDENT UNION

Despertando

index

indice

Introduction.....	p.1
Nacimiento	p. 3
Origin or Migration	p. 4
Los Barrios	p.7
Culture of Survival	p. 11
Si, es Posible	p.14
Organizations in our Community	p. 15
The Student Movement	p.17
The Beginning	p. 19

The Puerto Rican student union was formed by a group of Puerto Rican students from colleges all over New York City, the Five Rutgers campuses, and parts of the state university system. In December, 1969, we had a founding convention at which this document was presented as a proposed policy statement for the union. After some changes, the paper was adopted and is now one of our organizing tools.

We do not believe that words or papers will bring about a change in the everyday life of the Puerto Rican either here in the United States or in Puerto Rico. We clearly understand from years and years of being hit over the head with it, that the only way that our people will become free from disease, poverty, ignorance, oppression, exploitation and cultural and physical genocide is through the use of force.

However we understand that we are just beginning to awaken from a deep sleep the United States power structure has put on us. We also know that the process of liberation is long, hard and many times discouraging.

The words written in this pamphlet are not meant to reflect the final truth of our situation or our future condition but are meant to awaken our brothers and sisters in the schools to the reality that unless we act now, we may be the last Puerto Ricans on this planet. That not only are we being made to forget our language, but that our music is being diluted into "Latin Rock", our eating habits are being changed from "bullet proof rice and beans" (as the Puerto Rican poet Pedro Pierti says) to T.V. dinners, and most important of all that we are daily being killed in the fields of Vietnam, on our streets, on the campus of the university of Puerto Rico and in hospitals, both here and in Boriquen. The fact that sterilization of women is greater among Puerto Ricans than any other group is an indication that the ruling class of the United States has no more use for spics.

But we hope that you, brother and sister, who read this pamphlet do not just dig on it and then go on bugalooing at the Saint George or sniffing, popping and puffing your life away. Nor do we want you to become a social worker type liberal who suddenly decides to help "the people."

We want you to dig yourself. Understand what you are, what you have become. Work very hard to see where you have come from. Fight to find out who are our ancestors, so that you may know what to say to our children. And then go out, get together with brothers and sisters like your selves and act like the warriors

that we are. Begin to serve our community, fight for it to control every institution in it, and defend it by any and every means necessary.

Time is short, brothers and sisters, and we can't sit to debate whether or not Puerto Rico should be independent, or whether or not we should be advocating the use of force to gain our liberation. The shit is on, and there's no turning around. You either will be part of the problem or part of the solution. Understand what you are, then you'll know what to do.

NACIMIENTO

Somos Puertorriquenos y estamos despertando. We were born on September 23, 1863 when the patriotic forces of Ramon Emeterio Betances entered the town of Lares and proclaimed the Republic of Puerto Rico. That event marked our emergence as a people distinctly different from the Spaniards, the Africans and the Indians from which we came. On that day, our great-grandfathers said to the world: We are Puerto Ricans; we are black, we are brown and we are white. Our language is Spanish in form, and Creole in content. But our culture, our history and future is one. We are the people of the world as they shall look in the future. We are of the Americas, children of the Antilles. Our island is small but filled with natures purest beauty. We are relatively few in numbers, but rich in warmth, brotherhood and life. Races of mankind, cultures of the continents, you have given birth to us and now we proclaim to you our existence. Que viva Puerto Rico libre!!

El Grito de Lares not only proclaimed our emergence as people, but began a struggle for liberation that continues to this day. Though our Indian ancestors had valiantly fought the invading Spaniards, and our African forefathers, the captured warriors Spaniards brought to the island as slaves, fought for freedom, and later the creole Spaniards struggled for independence from Spain, it was not until El Grito de Lares, that our struggle became that of Puerto Ricans, not Indian, African or Spaniard. It was on that day in September, 1868, that we recognized what we had become and what we had to do. That cry was heard through our the rest of the 1800's, particularly when the struggle for autonomy from Spain was taken to the Spanish Cortes and a charter of autonomy was gotten. But the invasion of Puerto Rico by U.S. marines in 1898, ripped from us our newly acquired freedom so quickly and ruthlessly that it was to be 30 years before another voice was to be raised to take up the cry of Lares.

Pedro Albizu Campos, un mullato, rekindled our struggle for freedom and definition as a people. He revived our spirit and threatened to unify us to such an extent, that the U.S. and its colonial collaborators set into motion a process that would culminate in the rewriting of history, the assaulting of our culture, and the forced migration of over one and a half million of our people from our island.

From the beginning of its occupation of our land, the United States attempted systematically to destroy our language, our culture and our will to resist. Colonial authorities made English the official language and proclaimed Spanish a second language to be kept as a quaint remembrance of the past. They rewrote our history books and made Puerto Rican History end in 1898. They forced our jibaros off the land and sold it to yankee corporations. Essentially, the United States attempted to transform our people from men and women of the earth, owners of their land, to tenants and laborers on someone else's land.

Pedro Albizu Campos rose and spoke to Puerto Ricans of what we were becoming. Everywhere he went, he explained that as long as Puerto Ricans remained enangotao, they would never be free. And our people began to respond. During the depression of the 30's, strikes shook the U.S. companies on the island. When Don Pedro came forth and spoke to the strikers, the United States authorities acted swiftly. The repression of the Nationalist Party was started and preparations were made to introduce the economic reforms of the "New Deal" of the Roosevelt administration to Puerto Rico.

ORIGIN OF MIGRATION

United States actions in Puerto Rico for the next 30 years reflected a growing U.S. penetration of Latin America, and Puerto Rico's role in that penetration.

The U.S. understood that it must increase its economic and military control of Latin America if those countries were to be kept from becoming independent. Latin America has served as a source of raw materials and markets for United States' companies out raping the world and stealing its wealth. The U.S. clearly saw that the key to controlling Latin America was controlling Puerto Rico. Situated in the Carribean, at the crossroads of North, South East and West travel, Puerto Rico was a strategic point of departure for troops and a guardian of the Panama Canal, which the United States also controlled.

The United States also knew, however, that military control of a colony was not enough to break a peoples' will to resist. This became more obvious when Don Pedro emerged as a leader of Puerto Ricans. Faced with this reality, the U.S. decided to add cultural assimilation and economic domination to the oppressive military control. What they really decided was to psych us out. They would dizzy us with material prosperity and "americanize" us—thus breaking down our identity and eliminating any

possibility of rebellion.

To begin the economic "development" of Puerto Rico, the United States dug deep into its trick bag, reaching into the heart of the Greenwich Village artist circle and pulling out Luis Munoz Marin, son of Munoz Rivera. This man was given the task of making Puerto Rico safe for American investors and of procuring for the U.S. a stable military bastion from where it could oversee its empire in South America.

The only way that this could be done was to employ as many people as possible, (so as to keep the population from economic complaints that would give rise to rebellion) and to crush any opposition like that from Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party. The first was done by bringing in American Companies to open up factories in Puerto Rico, and the second was done by completely perverting the name and reality of what Don Pedro said, did, and stood for. The companies (operating for profits and not for Puerto Rico's needs) were for the most part, producers of things that were put together in the island and then shipped back to the United States. Everything that was to be produced was exported and everything that was to be consumed on the island was imported from the United States. This intensified and perpetuated a total economic dependency of Puerto Rico on the United States. The factories were brought in under heavy incentives that allowed them to set up shop and operate without having to pay taxes for a ten year period and by having a cheap supply of Puerto Rican laborers that were not paid the same wages as workers in the U.S.

The attack on Don Pedro and the Nationalist Party was comparable in many ways to what the U.S. government is doing now to the Black Panther Party. Don Pedro was called a violent, raving maniac who was mad at the U.S. because he had been discriminated against while a student at Harvard. He was called a racist, a fascist and everything else under the sun. A propaganda campaign of an intensity unknown in Puerto Rican history was begun against this man and in many ways it was successful. People became scared of the Nationalist Party and Don Pedro.

The newspapers (all of them controlled by the U.S.) daily smeared his name in different ways. To this day, many Puerto Ricans still speak of Don Pedro as a crazy man who went too far.

But the attack was intense because the man was intense. Don Pedro was a man who spoke of the yankee monster who had invaded our land and proceeded to plunder and steal its riches. He

spoke of a vision—a vision that Puerto Ricans had spoken of for 100 years—that of an Antillean federation of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the sister islands. But Don Pedro and the Nationalist Party were repressed ruthlessly and jailed, killed or exiled.

During the early 1940's, Luis Munoz Marin began preparing the administrative machinery to implement the new economic "development" of Puerto Rico. In 1945, when the Puerto Ricans who had been forced to serve in the U.S. army came home, they were confronted with the new colonial administration's first job: to rid the island of one third of its population. In order to create a "stable" political situation that would allow a rapid military build-up of U.S. forces and military installations on the Island, the U.S. had to rapidly employ large numbers of the population. But Puerto Rico was then, and continues to be to some extent, one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Rapid economic development, U.S. style, meant that the U.S. companies could not employ everybody quickly enough. Therefore, elimination of a large part of those people who had to be employed became a solution.

A subtle but systematic forced migration was begun that moved Puerto Ricans to the U.S. where there was (supposedly) "gold in the streets, jobs a plenty and two cars in every garage." (In addition to this type of migration, another more inhuman one was perpetrated: recruiting of Puerto Ricans in the country side and sending them to farms in the U.S. to become farm workers. The story of the Puerto Rican farm worker is one that has yet to be told fully, but when it is, it will reveal the inhumanity and exploitation of man towards man and will unleash a force that has been hidden in the farms of upstate New York, New Jersey, Long Island, Michigan, Pennsylvania and other states for 20 years.)

Large numbers of us began arriving in New York in 1945, having taken the short hop to Miami, then on up or having ridden the insides of the Marine Tiger Line banana boats. But the greatest bulk of us came between 1950 and 1955. We were not, however, the first Puerto Ricans to come to New York. In the 1860's Betances had been in New York, with other patriots, planning the liberation of Puerto Rico. At the turn of the century, the PLA (Puerto Rican Liberation Army) was being formed to free Puerto Rico from the U.S. Munoz Rivera, while in

the Cortes of Spain had opportunistically threatened to join the PLA if the Cortes (Spanish Parliament) did not approve the charter of autonomy..

Throughout the first half of the 1900's, we trickled our way north. (By 1940 there was about 40,000 Puerto Ricans in El Barrio). But the migration was a great wave of people uprooted within a short period of time and transplanted onto another soil. Over 400,000 went north within a ten year period.

LOS BARRIOS

Unlike the great forced migrations from Africa, during the slave trade, that separated families from each other, individuals from their tribes, members of the tribe from their leaders, the Puerto Rican migration was one of an entire people. We brought not only our families intact (though in most cases, one at a time) but our leaders (so-called), our culture and even our chickens (in the 50's, one could attend cock fights in El Barrio most any weekend). And unlike the waves of European immigrants that had come to the United States during all of the previous generations, we brought our culture with no intention of forgetting it for some jive gringo culture. Our fight against North American cultural domination had been going on since the first marines landed on our island 50 years before the migration. So when we came to the U.S. we brought that struggle along with us and continued it on other levels.

The first ten years of our new life in the concrete jungles of the city were a constant struggle between trying to recreate the conditions of life we had known in our island towns, and coming to grips with the naked savagery of the city. We hung out on the street, just as at home we had promenaded ourselves at our leisure throughout our plazas; we knew everyone on our block; we set up the infrastructure of town life: boliteros, santeras, bodegas, barberias, tiendas de cuchifritos, etc. But we had to contend with two great realities—one was a racist and exploitative system that sought to mold us into what they thought we should be, and the other a racist white population that wanted no part of us.

The need to survive taught us how to fight the hostile white population. Almost immediately upon moving into El Barrio, next to what was up until then an Italian neighborhood, our young brother's and sisters began forming street gangs to protect themselves and our community from the beatings of the Italians.

We were so successful at jitterbugging, that after a short period of time we had no one to fight so we began to fight each other. What had started out as a necessity turned into a virtue. Soon gangs began to show up wherever we had moved, even though the original reason for them many times was no longer there.

Our battles against the system have not been as successful as our gang fights. We have been herded into the most decrepid slums and tenements and forced to pay high rents. We have to scream for the basic necessities of an apartment (heat, cleanliness and maintenance), and never get them. But the fat landlords keep getting their rent and not worrying too much about spic complaints. Our children, and many times adults, suffer from rat bites, lead poisoning, colds and fevers from lack of heat, and accidents from walls and floors caving in. The City agencies which are supposed to inspect buildings are in with the landlords and are paid off by them so as not to declare violations.

Every other institution of the city treats us the same way. The garbage collectors don't bother to pick up the trash—when they do come through they leave more on the streets than they take. Doctors keep us waiting in hospital hallways while they have their coffee breaks or tell each other jokes about how “those spiks are always cutting themselves up.” Instead of providing us with medical care (which is necessary for survival) hospitals are butcher houses where we are experimented on. New drugs are tried on us without our knowing it; needless operations are performed on us for practice, and lately, our women are having their tubes tied and are being sterilized so that we may not reproduce ourselves. Another more recent occurrence is the way in which birth control is pushed. While it is crucial for every woman to be able to decide whether or not she wishes to have another child, there is much more birth control information available in Black and Puerto Rican communities than in poor white communities, because the power structure wants to make sure we do not expand.

The jobs that we were given upon our arrival in the city were the lowliest, most dehumanizing ones to be found. We were made dishwashers, doormen, messenger boys, maids, floor cleaners, and bed pan carriers in the hospitals. In the garment district, where so many of our people went to find jobs, our women sweat over hot machines while our men push the cadillac carts on the streets carrying clothing and materials from one side of seventh avenue to another. Our wages are the lowest and the least dependable. When time comes to lay off people, we go first. In those areas

where we are unionized, the leadership is often racist and unresponsive to our needs. Unemployment has in fact become a part of life in our communities.

To deal with so many spics running around with extra time on their hands and to keep us from getting any ideas about what is happening, the power structure uses yet another tentacle on our community -the school- to keep us under control. When a man or woman feels inferior, doesn't know who he is or where he has come from; can't read or write well and is afraid to challenge the unknown, then that person will not complain about his or her situation and will, in fact, be putty in someone else's hands. In line with this, the schools have been given the task of deforming our youth, making them stupid and teaching them to obey authority. We are told not to speak Spanish because English is better and Spanish is from the "old country;" and that because we can't read English we are "underachievers," slow readers, or some such euphemism; that we are naturally rowdy and unable to learn or unwilling to do so; that our homelife is hurting us because it is "under-privileged;" that we have no future so we had better take their advice and train for a job instead of going to college; and so on.

The longer we stay in the existing schools the dumber and more screwed up psychologically we become. Those who survive this deforming machine face death or further indoctrination in the army, or walking death at the end of a needle in the streets. The Mafia, being another organ of control in our community makes sure that we are well supplied with heroin and cocaine to keep our bodies and souls occupied and unable to think about our situations.

For those of us who cannot be kept quiet and uncomplaining through drugs or the armed services, the welfare system is used. People on welfare are made to spend their energies fighting for bare subsistence against constant threats of cutbacks instead of questioning the whole system and fighting for decent relevant and well-paying jobs.

Yet even all of the institutional forms of oppression that are used to insure our willing and continued service to business and government have not been enough to keep us down. They must place an occupation army, comparable to the military bases and troops that are used to occupy our island, in our community to keep us under control. We have suffered murder, brutality, abuse, degradation and harrassment for 25 years at the hands of the

police forces in our communities. Our brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, cousins, aunts and uncles—thousands of them—are in the state and county jails of this country for nothing more than being Puerto Rican and fighting against the role that this society forces on us. Our fight for a better life is their fight too, and our objectives include their liberation from the prison cells to which they have been unjustly sent by racist police and white middle class judges and juries. The prostitutes, bookies, gang members, boliteros, hold up men, junkies and debtors who have been sent to jail are Puerto Ricans who have understood well the values of the society, work your ass off for twenty years, then enjoy the benefits of saving and credit buying. But they see the great contradiction between being told to wait twenty years, to get benefits and what the TV, the media, the movies and schools tell us is available now. If you work hard, and keep your nose clean, you'll make it. But they reject this backbreaking, nerve shattering twenty year existence, and decide to skip over a few steps and get right to the goodies. Why play the game by their rules, they ask, if the end is the same; material goods, comfort and leisure? Businessmen cheat and steal, the Mafia kills and the government oppresses each for its own benefit. So why not hustle and go for broke?

The power structure has always understood this psychology very well and has dealt with it accordingly: Jail for the "law breakers," and terror for the potential "law breakers." Thus, they are all political prisoners, brothers and sisters who have felt the system and rejected its rules. We must create for them and ourselves another alternative, a truly effective way of adding meaning to this life. We can do this by fighting for social change and telling our brothers and sisters, "yes," we also want material benefits, comfort and leisure, but not only for ourselves, but for all people. The only way to achieve this is not individually through individual confrontation with the system, but collectively with our strength focused on those institutions that control the wealth in the society.

Culture of Survival

Riding the subway, taking the bus, or walking into another culture (white, middle class) every day of our lives, and then coming home to our own way of life has created in us Puerto Ricans here in the United States, a double psychology. At the job, in schools, in all of the institutions that we come across each day, we are told that our culture is no good, that it is old, inferior and irrelevant; that it will not enable us to deal with the "realities" of adopting and making it in "The American Way". We fight this by adopting black culture and becoming pure soul brothers, or by changing our names and moving into white neighborhoods where we can pass for white (if the whites don't hear our accents.) But in each case, we come home again, to be confronted with ourselves, our Puerto Rican selves. These selves and that reality are unique. Our multiracial black, white and brown skins make us an integrated people in a white racist society. Our music, our slang, our customs all derive from an Afro-antillean culture that has been developed over the centuries and that continues to grow wherever it finds worthy roots. Here in the United States, for example, we have very easily adapted to soul music and afro-american culture because it is harmonious with our own African roots.

But coming home in itself does not provide us with the necessary reinforcements of what we are and what we're all about. There is another part of our culture which is a key to our existence as a people and our understanding of ourselves individually. And that is freedom; the freedom to shape our lives as we individually and collectively wish to. The freedom to control every aspect of our lives from the kind of community we want to live in, to the kind of entertainment we want to indulge in, to the kind of occupations we want to spend our lives doing. We need freedom to control our communities, our bodies, our schools, our occupations, our relationships, our future . our present. Since our great-grandfathers first cried *Grito de Lares* to the world, we have continued our fight for freedom

Our brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, and friends continue that fight for freedom in Puerto Rico. We must in order to fulfill ourselves, to integrate our identities of the present with our history and future existence, have freedom. The forced migrations have placed us a Caribbean, an Afro-Antillean, a Latin-American people in North American cities. We cannot yet determine (because we are not economically, socially, culturally,

educationally prepared) whether or not we wish to remain in these North American cities; or return to our island. We know that if we returned to our island, as it is now structured and controlled by the giant United States' corporations, we could not find enough jobs and livelihood. Our friends and relatives there, however, can determine how that fight for liberation and freedom will be shaped. We here, however, cannot wait around for our brothers' and sisters' freedom to be achieved in order to better our lives here or change them. We must begin to change ourselves now, understanding that fighting for a better life here helps our compatriots' liberation in Puerto Rico.

This is a duality which we must never forget, for though, just like our Afro-American brothers and sisters, we are an exploited minority, in *this* country, we are part of a people from *another* country who have a land, a tongue, and a culture of our own that is striving and seeking to take its place among the nations of the world. And that world as it looks today, with nuclear annihilation around the corner and genocide committed daily in fields of Vietnam, the forests of Latin America, and the streets of our ghettos, needs more than ever the order and humanity which the colored people of Latin America, Asia and Africa can provide. This planet has too long been ruled and ruined by northern European and North American chaos and inhumanity. In absolute terms, we Puerto Ricans are not a minority, but part of that great majority of mankind, the people of the Third World.

COMMUNITY STRUGGLES

Our everyday lives are controlled by institutions. The real estate interests (landlords, investors, banks) that own the high rent, slum apartments; the schools; the welfare system, the companies for which we work; the city agencies that administer services (garbage disposal, health department, etc) the police, the army in which we are forced to serve all are institutions. Economic, political and social control in the U.S today is exercised through institutions such as these. The city, state and federal government regulate this exercising of power but are not always themselves decision makers such as in the real estate industry. There, for instance, the collaboration between the city agencies involved in planning, zoning and development and the real estate interests is so great, that these agencies are functionally real estate groups rather than regulators. The real power structure, where policy decisions are made for economic development, social legislation, foreign policy, etc., is composed of interested groups that control institutions in their own interests instead of in the interests of the people that they are supposed to serve. For us to improve our

daily lives and begin to return power back to our communities, we must analyze the institutions that affect us, disseminate that information to the people affected by that institution, begin the process of struggle within it and in addition to getting reforms, work to take the institution apart and put it back together again to be answerable to our needs. Along the way, we may have to build alternative institutions.

But the interest groups that control these institutions are outside of our communities. For example, though we may gain control of the curriculum and hiring and firing of teachers in our schools, the state legislature allocates funds for the operation of the schools and can decide to cut money back, as they did recently. Also, even though there are large numbers of our people on welfare or generally unemployed, it is the corporations who maintain the unemployment rate, through hiring and firing practices. They do this to keep a large section of the population unemployed and competing for jobs, so that wages can be kept low, as they have been.

So in order to effectively bring about changes in our lives and begin deciding for ourselves, what to do with the resources available in the society at large, we must eventually take our fight beyond the community. In the process, we will find other people, particularly Afro-Americans that also are attempting to gain control over their communities. Our battles will have to be fought in many instances in alliance with other oppressed people such as the Chicanos, Afro-Americans and Poor Whites that are also fighting and working for control of their communities. Eventually we will come to the realization that we must not only control our communities, but every aspect of life, from the use of natural resources (to stop the pollution of the air and water that is rapidly being used up) to the prevention of wars that send our brothers off to fight against exploited people around the world who are seeking the same freedom to control their lives, as we are. We will begin to see that the sending of rockets to the moon has a very definite relation to the fact that we don't have enough money in our communities to spend on hungry children.

To summarize, we will many times be effective in our community struggles only if we make alliances with other groups affected by the same institutions and if we take our struggle to whatever levels necessary to reach the true holders of power.

This of course must be decided each time. What is most important for us to remember is that we must fight those battles for control and change as Puerto Ricans, not as a vague and general "people."

SI, ES POSIBLE

One of the things that has kept us Puerto Ricans from changing and improving our living conditions in this country, has been our tendency to ask for what we want and need instead of demanding it. This has happened because we have accepted the bullshit reasons that the power structure gives us for not "being able to do anything about it, though we'd like to." This tendency has developed over a long period and originated with the psychological impact of the cultural, economic and military assault that was perpetrated on us in Puerto Rico by the U.S. The fact that we have never been independent and that we have always had someone other than ourselves determining what is good for us and what we need, has encouraged the infamous "ay bendito" complex that is at the root of our lack of militancy. This attitude can be eliminated, with, among other things, a clear understanding of what exists in this society and what is possible to achieve in our lifetime. If we know what is possible, we can better know what to fight for and where to get it from.

The United States today contains the most advanced technological and scientific knowledge and machinery in the history of mankind. It can send men in rocket ships to the moon, send submarines to explore the ocean floor, replace the parts of the human body, develop thinking machines that think thousands of times faster and more accurately than the human mind, and so on to an endless list of realities. Yet what characterizes the United States' way of life is not abundance, brotherhood and peace (as one might think) but poverty, disease, hunger, inhumanity, racism and war. In the face of these blatant contradictions, the power structure consistently allocates our tax money in the interests of corporations and businessmen instead of poor and working people. The world trade center will be built in New York, but not low income housing. An upper middle income housing development will be built on the Harlem River to service upper Manhattan and the West Bronx, but the South Bronx will go on being the worst slum in the city. The police department is mechanized, updated and expanded (James Bond style), but funds are cut back for welfare and schools. Billions of dollars are invested in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to rob more wealth from those helpless countries (under government subsidies, with tax dollars) but money is not spent on raising our salaries that continue to buy less as prices go up.

To control how money is allocated, where it is spent, in what amounts and how fast, we must know what money is available, where it is generated from, where decisions are really made that determine policy for allocation of funds and what are the details of who spends it. We must change our attitudes and demand what we need, for we know that our needs can and must be fulfilled. We must approach the power structure not with our hat in hand trying to explain what our situation is and that we want to better it. NO. The power structure at whatever level knows the problems more than anyone else. They are part of the problem, . . .

We were not always oppressed but became oppressed and exploited and subsequently poor and hungry by someone else's conscious decision. Wherever our struggle finds us we must go in demanding what we need and want. We can do no less after years of begging and talking with our hands over our mouths, in the presence of our oppressor. We must always remember that everything is possible, and that no matter what obstacles are placed in our way, "the spirit of the people is greater than the man's technology."

ORGANIZATIONS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The first organizations that tried to deal with our situation in the barrios, were the store front social work oriented operations of the middle 1950's and early 1960's. That activity, though small, was intense and much needs to be known of that period. They tried to get us to accept our situation, and "work within the system" and to "do what we can" to change it. Then the poverty programs came into being. The power structure understood that enough activity was going on in Afro-American, Puerto Rican and Chicano communities to force them to increase their crumbs to our table. Our most active people were recruited, coopted and placed into community corporations, development projects, action groups, brotherhood associations, block associations, this board, that board. You name it and the power structure had a proposal and funding line for it. Yet all of these organizations and all of the activity and motion they have created, have not changed our lives. We still have rats, garbage in our streets, low-paying jobs, no health care, thousands are on welfare, in jail or being killed in the army, and the police still patrol our communities like an army of occupation unanswerable to our demands for justice.

New organizational forms of struggle with clearer political orientations must be developed for us to effectively deal with the problems of our communities. The existence of a student movement allows us to intensify our struggle for a better life and focus on the real centers of power, and add another arm and a new dimension to that struggle. However we must clearly understand our roles as Puerto Rican students.

We must see that we are no different from our brothers and sisters who are not in the colleges and the universities. We must not accept the jive bourgeois bullshit that intellectual ability and knowledge of facts differentiates some people from others and legitimates their power and authority over others. This also means that we must keep our street wisdom and be proud of it, for it has kept us alive in the face of oppression. In relating to our communities' struggles, we must be aware of how those struggles have developed over the past five years and what characterizes them. The features of that movement that have come about through practice and experience, (the struggles for community control of schools, patients' regulation of hospital services, and control of garbage collection and other services,) have taken the form of community participation and democratic control. The parents who opened up the city schools did not want revolutionary Puerto Ricans to sit on the central board of education and implement the wishes of the community. They want to eliminate the central Board of Education and replace it with democratically and locally controlled boards. So, again, one key feature of all those struggles is community participation and democratic control of institutions by the people affected by them.

Our people have said to the social workers, poverty program surveyors and model cities developers, *vayanse a comer mierda*, when it comes to deciding what needs to be done in our community. For years "experts" have studied us, surveyed us, questioned us and generally stared at us then went back down town (or under the poverty programs, stayed up town) and decided what our problems were and how they should be solved. By virtue of their expertise and access to information, they tell us, they are in a better position to see "the over-all picture," and decide what's best for us. The city decides by its own logic how many low income units are to be built in our community, not based on what we say we need but by what they say they know, according to real estate "trends." The school administrations decide what schools and programs we should be in because they know our aptitude and potential.

But our community has said over and over again the *WE* know what needs to be done and, expert or not, we will decide. This is particularly important for us (as students) to understand for in relating to community struggles, we will be tempted to define what the issues are, and then "lead" the struggle because of our "analytical" abilities.

So, let us be conscious that all community struggles are democratic and participatory and are based on general knowledge of all information regarding the issue to prevent manipulation because of "expertise."

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The existence and development of community struggles around the educational system, have pressured the power structure into taking large numbers of us young Puerto Ricans and placing us in the colleges. As has been well documented by community and research groups, the educational institutions have systematically kept us out of the colleges and universities. Now we are being allowed in because of our growing pressure, but also because of economic reasons. The level of technology in the U.S. is rising so quickly that more technically prepared and "socially dependable" people are needed to produce the wealth of this country. Our presence in the schools therefore has a purpose for us and one for the power structure. They want us to come into the colleges, learn a skill, learn to take orders, forget that we're Puerto Ricans and become instead carbon copies of white middle class "americans". Our purpose in the schools must be:

1. to learn a skill that will help us better understand the mechanical, economic and social workings of the system.
2. to learn about ourselves, our history both here and in P.R., our culture, our identity as a people.
3. to bring the services of the university to the community which is denied the knowledge behind those "ivy walls" because of jive requirements, that are made to keep the majority of the people ignorant and make a minority of the people think that they are together and can rule over others because they know more.

If in addition to this we understand the struggle in the community then we will be better capable of integrating ourselves with those struggles without either of them sacrificing one to another.

We are students for four years but Puerto Ricans all our lives. But this does not mean that we should forsake the necessary stages of students struggles. We must definitely fight for open admissions policies that get more of us into schools. But many of our brothers drop out of school for lack of money, bad counseling, no remedial training, and general alienation in a hostile and racist environment. Therefore, these struggles must be waged to keep us *in* school. More important is that we must never romanticize the struggles in the communities and counterpose them to struggles in the schools, saying those in the community are revolutionary and relevant and these are reformist and irrelevant. All are struggles to better our lives and all must be gone through as stages in an overall struggle for change and control.

A Puerto Rican student movement can help us become more politically aware, learn organizing skills that we desperately need, and create an organization that will encompass all Puerto Rican students, at every level.

The perspective outlined below is not a mandate to be followed strictly by the student union. We are, in the first place, a wide variety of brothers and sisters of differing political levels of consciousness and activity. Some of us see our struggle in much broader terms than others who see the struggle in terms of personal achievement and "getting a piece of the action." But the Puerto Rican student union must be able to accomodate all Puerto Ricans who are fighting for social change. It can serve, in addition to everything else, as a forum where we can exchange ideas, action plans, etc., and attempt to stimulate the brothers and sisters within the organization to different actions and positions. Situations are constantly changing and therefore actions and analysis must change with them. Whatever we project now as a strategy we must evaluate when it is no longer functional. Three general levels at which we can operate are:

1. Student Struggles. . . In the university we must deal with open enrollment (and its equivalent in the private universities)/Puerto Rican studies/better counseling/control of classroom situations (cuts, grading, etc.)/and improvement of the quality and variety of courses. These fights should always be educative so that through them our brothers and sisters will have an increasing understanding of the bureaucracy that controls the university.

2. Integration into Community Struggles

a. We should use all school facilities to service community struggles (this includes supplies, money from clubs and student governments, and facilities for meetings and events).

b. We should develop organizing projects both massively during breaks and summer sessions (such as in liberation schools), and individually during the regular sessions.

c. We must provide total support for all community demonstrations, actions, takeovers, etc; all the time giving whatever technical skills we may have.

3. Needless to say, after getting out of school we should work to create new organizational forms of struggle that will be consistent with the levels of the struggle at a given place and time.

4. Through our existence as an organization we should give total support to our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico who are fighting to control our island, its wealth and the technology that has been developed there through their sweat and labor. Only they can decide the nature and development of that struggle and must totally support it.

THE BEGINNING

The road ahead of us will be long and hard. We will spend many sleepless, hungry and nervous days and nights. We may suffer harassment, brutality and possible death or imprisonment at the hands of the police and its agents. The power structure has seen fit to crack the heads of welfare mothers fighting to get food money cutbacks restored. They will be ready to use no less force on us. But this hard life of injustice and these conditions are the ones under which a majority of our people live daily. We should say strongly as has been said before, that as long as there are brothers and sisters classified as lower class, we are part of it; that as long as there are "criminals" in our community, we are one of them, and that as long as there is one brother or sister in jail, we are not free.

We must face this struggle with determination, and above all else, love for our people. Our primary goal must be the liberation of our people and the elimination of disease, hunger, ignorance and exploitation. We will fight not to die, but to live. To live proud, beautiful and strong, to shout to our children and the world.

SOMOS PUERTORRIQUENOS, HIJOS DE BORINQUEN BELLA

I would like copies of this pamphlet at the cost of 10% discount for all copies in the amount of ten or over.

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